

## Headaches

Unfortunately, headaches are all too familiar an experience for many of us. They can range from a mild annoyance that probably doesn't even warrant opening the Paracetamol bottle to a most debilitating problem that drives people to bed in a darkened room. They can affect men and woman, people of all ages including children and good physical fitness is no protection against them.

Headaches have been well studied by the medical world and specific clinics have been set up to deal with those people suffering from the most severe headaches. There is even an International Headache Society.

It is interesting to note that over 300 different types of headaches have been described in the medical literature but classically headache is divided in to two main categories – tension headaches and migraine.

For many years Chartered Physiotherapists have been examining the upper neck as a potential cause of headaches. There are many connections between the upper part of the neck and the head/face through the nerves that run between the two areas. This means that a problem that originates in the neck can be mistakenly identified by the brain as a problem (usually pain but not always) in the face or head.

Problems in the upper neck can arise from a sudden event such as a whiplash injury or can develop from postural changes that build up over months and years. Conditions such as arthritis can also produce painful changes in the neck.

These obviously may present as pain and/or stiffness in the neck but they can also present as a range of symptoms affecting the head. Pain is the usual one but sufferers may also experience nausea, dizziness, symptoms affecting the eyes or ears and sweating.

So what would happen if someone suffering with headaches visited a Chartered Physiotherapist?

Firstly the Chartered Physiotherapist would go through an examination. This would start with some detailed questioning about headache. This will give the Physiotherapist vital clues as to whether the headache is likely to be coming from the neck and also if there is any potentially dangerous condition that warrants further investigation such as blood tests or scans. It also gives the individual with the headache a chance to ask a few questions – many people with severe and regular headaches harbour a secret dread that they have a brain tumour. This is really very rare.

Once the questions are complete the Physiotherapist will then examine the joints, muscles, nerves and blood vessels of the neck.

If the headache can be affected by carefully stressing segments of the spine, then the outlook is very good for treatment.

Treatment will then proceed by addressing the affected segments in the spine by hands on treatment and a regime of home exercise. Attention will be paid to postural correction and lifestyle issues such as work, sports and hobbies.

Far too many people suffer unnecessarily with headaches when appropriate treatment could provide them with significant relief.

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